ML BULLETIN

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MR. SCRIMGEOUR'S HOLIDAY PICTURES

By Leora Wood Wells

> A lantern picture ought to have only a brief statement on each slide, with a little story or incident at the end of it, so that, while the people are enjoying the Tid-bit, the picture dissolves and the next appears... Sometimes you may be led to improve the occasion by an earnest word or even a Gospel appeal, and this will not make the lecture less interesting to a general audience.
>
> C.W. Scrimgeour

The Rev. Mr. C.W. Scrimgeour, who ran a Gospel Mission in Dundee, Scotland, during the latter part of the nineteenth century, was a prime example of the amateur magic lantern lecturer whose goal was to inform and persuade by entertaining. He and his wife Agnes spent their vacations traveling in foreign lands and trying to capture the flavor of each for their Mission audiences.

One of their favorite ways of doing this was to intersperse the predictable slides of buildings and bridges and ruins with slides of what appears to have been their favorite topic: the demise of the human race. They had no hesitation about joining and photographing the mourning party whenever they were lucky enough to happen onto a funeral. They did this repeatedly with no apparent sense that they might be invading the privacy of strangers. One day in Greece, they followed a procession all the way into a church. "The coffin was open," Scrimgeour reported, "and the people came and looked on the face of the deceased. We heard the service and witnessed the interment, as we like to see how things are done in other lands."

"A trip to Touville provided a fine slide of the Funeral of a Little Girl," and Scrimgeour gave a moving description of the "little mourners dressed in white, with long veils over their heads, who carried the tiny coffin to the burying ground." When a fellow passenger died as the Scrimgeours were crossing the Red Sea, they photographed the funeral at sea and used the slides as the climax of their next show. As the clergyman ended the service, Scrimgeour reported in his lecture, the plank was raised to allow the flag-draped coffin to slide beneath the waves. Thus, "the sea, the blue lone sea, had one more to lie where pearls lie deep."

Scrimgeour's greatest triumph may well have been being able to treat his viewers to a slide and description of the Paris Morgue. "Suicide is so common and deeds of darkness are so often done in Paris," he commented, "that for purposes of identification, such a place is indispensable. The Morgue stands on the Main Street, not far from Norte Dame. The doors are open, and anyone can pass in and see the bodies as they lie--just like goods in a shop window. There were the bodies of two men and one of a woman when we went in; it was a gruesome sight."

Since books of slide lectures were enjoying enormous popularity at this period, Scrimgeour decided to make his own lectures available to a broader audience than his mission provided. Most such books were heavily illustrated with the photographs used in the slide shows. Not so, Mr. Scrimgeour's book. The cover carries a picture of an impressive triunial lantern, but aside from portraits of the author and his wife, the book contains not a single illustration. Scrimgeour called it, in all honesty, Lantern Lectures Without The Slides. Readers who wanted to see what the places he described looked like, he suggested, would do well to make a collection of picture postcards.

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Lantern Lectures Without The Slides was published in 1907 by James P. Mathew & Co., Cowgate, Dundee. Mr. Scrimgeour was also the author of an earlier book entitled Gospel Temperance Anecdotes.

AN ILLUMINATING TALE
By Joseph Kloss

Someone once asked me how I got started tinkering with magic lanterns. In the following story I will try and tell you how my first effort just might have been my last.

We shall go back to the time when I was about nine years old. It was a hot summer afternoon in Wisconsin, during school vacation. I was in the basement of our home, trying to cool off, and wishing I could find something interesting to do. I was alone, my mother had gone to visit a sick neighbor. I touched all the tools on my father's tool rack, thinking maybe I could make something--then deciding against it, remembering that the previous summer, when attempting to make a scooter from an orange crate, I had tried to saw a board in half, and had sawed my thumb instead. What to do--what to do! I saw some old boxes in the corner of the fruit cellar and decided to do some rummaging.

The first & second box were filled with old odds and ends of no interest, but on the bottom of the third box I found--guess what--a toy magic lantern, complete with kerosene, lamp, and slides. It was packed in its own little box with a picture on the cover of a boy putting on a show. The lantern had been packed away years before and forgotten.

Oh, happy day!--this looked like my cup of tea, and I lost no time in setting the lantern up in a corner behind the furnace. However, I was disappointed with the quality of the projected picture--it was not bright or clear. When I turned up the wick in the lamp to make a larger flame, it darkened the chimney and made the picture worse than it was.

Then and there, I came to the conclusion that a brighter light was needed.

At the time of this story, our house was located on the outskirts of the city and electric power had not yet been installed; we used gas for cooking and lighting, and my mother used a gas heated iron for ironing clothes in the basement.

The iron had a flexible hose attached to it which was connected to a gas outlet on the wall. When I saw the gas iron, it gave me an idea for a bigger and brighter light. First,

I would disconnect the hose from the iron, then I would connect the hose to some lengths of gas pipe, attach an elbow and gas light jet (I had watched my father connect pipes), place the lantern--which had a hole on the bottom--over the gas jet, light the gas, and success would be mine. I could see it all in my mind's eye.

I pulled out the box of pipes and fittings from under my father's bench and went to work. I worked fast with the thought in mind that I would have to finish the project, try it out, take it apart, and put all the parts back before anyone came home. This was going to be my own secret invention.

Some of the connections did not fit too well, so I wound some bicycle tape around them to hold them together. There seemed to be a smell of gas around me as I worked.

I had the parts connected and was about to light the gas when my mother came home. I could hear her come into the kitchen, which was at the top of the basement stairs. Mother must have heard me because she came to the top of the stairs and called, "Joey, are you down there, and what are you doing?" It was at this moment that she smelled gas coming from the basement.

"I'm down here," I answered, "and I'm makin' something."

The gas smell and the words "makin' something" brought my mother down the stairs faster than she could say, "I wonder what that kid is up to now?" There was an explosion--not from the gas, but from my mother--when she saw the "something" I was "makin'!" She hurried me up the stairs faster than she had come down.

Later when my father came home she told him about my "escapade," and concluded with, "I just don't understand what goes on in that little brain of his." My father gave me a lengthy lecture about the danger of gas etc., etc., and I had to promise not to do anything like that again.

As I lay in bed that night, I told myself that when I "got big," I was going to have a magic lantern of my own with a much brighter light than I had gotten from the "dumb old kerosene lamp." Well, some how I "got big," and I now have a magic lantern collection--some with very bright lights--but believe it or not, ninety-five percent of the collection has--guess what?--"Dumb old Kerosene lamps"!

BROWNIES, WOGGLE-BUGS AND MAGIC LANTERNS
By Leora Wood Wells

To children of the pre-cinema era, one of the most startling things about magic lanterns was the size of the images they projected--not just life-size, but almost unimaginably large. Even some small home lanterns could produce a leering, snarling moonface six or eight feet high, a witch big enough to scare a small viewer out of six months growth, or a vast array of realistic or fanciful animals.

Somehow the insect slides used to illustrate science lessons in the schools held particular fascination. With a single motion of the teacher's wrist as a slide was pushed into place, the tiniest ladybug or dragonfly would appear upon the screen in proportions that dwarfed the attentive children. Complete and perfect in every detail, the huge, brightly colored pictures seemed almost more real than the insects themselves. They attracted and repelled. They inspired wonder and delight, but with a delicious undercurrent of fear. Just suppose, instead of being a picture, that the bug should turn out to be real!

This was a favorite fantasy, not only of children, but of the writers of children's books, at least those sensitive enough to remember and capture a child's perspective on the world.

Palmer Cox (1840-1924) was such a writer. From 1887 onward, his books about the Brownies enchanted several generations of children. The Brownies were what every child dreamed of being--always into some imaginative new adventure, always experimenting, always startling those outside their miniature world, yet mischievous only, and never bad or destructive.

It was the Brownies, working in the dead of a cold winter night, who put up a scaffolding and built a snowman so big and so solid that he didn't melt until May. It was the Brownies who set quietly to work one autumn night and harvested every last lucious apple in the orchard of a grouchy old farmer, storing them carefully in his barn so he wouldn't lose the crop to frost.

And so, inevitably, it was the Brownies who

> ...once with capers spry
> To an Academy drew nigh.

They mixed up batches of chemicals, experimented with dental tools, and examined a phrenological chart. Then:

> A microscope at length they found;
> And next the Brownies gathered round
> A stereopticon machine
> That cast its rays upon a screen.

Even the redoubtable Brownies were overwhelmed by what they saw: ordinary insects--a locust, a beetle and a bee--were suddenly magnified "a thousand times their real size." To the startled Brownies, the insects

> Seemed like monsters
> close at hand
> To put an end to all
> the band.

The Brownies wasted no time. They fled the room and found even the skeleton used in the anatomy class less frightening.

L. Frank Baum (1856-1919), that wonderful literary wizard who created the Oz books, carried the "living image" fantasy one step further. In The Land of Oz, he describes the "highly magnified history" of Mr. H.M. Woggle-Bug, T.E. The Woggle-Bug, Baum revealed, was once an ordinary bug. But one day he happened into a country schoolhouse and became so enraptured by the lectures of the school master that he remained for three years, becoming, in that time, "Thorough-

ly Educated."

Then one day the school master spotted him and "brought from a cupboard a most curious instrument." Before the Woggle-Bug could realize what was happening, he found himself "thrown upon a screen in a highly magnified state."

Here Baum took the final fantasy leap; the projected image, larger than life, became life itself. The Woggle-Bug, "knowing what is required of a cultured gentleman...stood upright and, placing a hand upon my bosom, made a very polite bow."

The act was sensational. So startled were the children that two of them fell backwards through the window and the entire schoolroom erupted in turmoil. The Woggle-Bug sized up the situation:

> It immediately occured to me that this was a good opportunity to escape. I was proud of my great size, and realized now that I could safely travel anywhere in the world... I calmly walked out of the school-house, turned a corner, and escaped unnoticed to a grove of trees that stood near.

From there, the Woggle-Bug, remaining permanently in his Highly Magnified state, went on to bigger and better adventures. His greatest ambition was to visit the Emerald City of Oz where he planned to give a course of lectures on--what else!--

> "The Advantages of Magnification."

It is an easy step from the fantasies of Cox and Baum to the grotesqueries of Hollywood's killer bees, oversized rats and blood-thirsty sharks. These are remarkable examples of film animation, but for all their sophisticated technology, they fall far short of the simple children's stories of Cox and Baum in capturing the intrinsic magic of the projected image.

THE MAGIC LANTERN IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

By Robert H. Woodward

Like any item used in popular culture and figuring in the day-to-day life of the people, the magic lantern has left its record in the literature of America.

Probably the most notable and most familiar reference to the magic lantern is in T.S. Eliot's famous 1915 poem, "The Love Song of Alfred Prufrock." The timid and inhibited Prufrock, though he senses the spritual and emotional sterility of the Western civilization that Eliot would later characterize fully in his poem "The Waste Land" (1922), is aware of the futility of bringing the shallowness of their lives to the attention of the fellow inhabitants of his meaningless world. Any comment he would make, he says, would reveal his sensitivity and expose him to scorn--"as if," he comments in line 105, "a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen."

Eliot's brief reference to the magic lantern suggests, even to modern readers unfamiliar with the device, some idea of a slide projector with which they are familiar; but it does not, of course, convey the social significance of the ancestors of the modern slide machines.

A more extended description of a magic lantern show at a time when lantern slides were

used by public lecturers and when lantern shows were a popular form of entertainment can be found in a novelette by the writer Harold Frederic that first appeared in the pages of The New York Times in six weekly Sunday issues beginning on April 29, 1894. The story "Marsena" (later included in Frederic's In the Sixties in 1897) is set in the New York village of Octavius, Frederic's fictional name for his hometown of Utica, during the Civil War. The fourth section of the story describes in some detail a "magic lantern performance" as part of a fair put on by the citizens for the purpose of raising money for the Field Hospital and Nurse Fund. Frederic vividly describes the kind of slides appropriate to the occasion as well as the difficulties an inexperienced operator had with "this new-fangled contrivance":

> Then came a flashing broad disk of light on the screen above the judges' bench, a spreading sibilant murmer of interest, and the show began.
> It was an oddly limited collection of pictures--mainly thin and feeble copies of newspaper engravings, photographic portraits and ideal heads from the magazines. Winfield Scott followed in the wake of Kossuth, and Garibaldi led the way for John C. Fremont and Lola Montez. There was applause for the long, familiar face of Lincoln, and a derisive snicker for the likeness of Jeff Davis turned upside down. Then came the local heroes from the district round about--Gen. Boyce, Col. McIntyre, and young Adjt. Heron, who had died so bravely at Ball's Bluff--mixed with some landscapes and statuary, and comic caricature or two. The rapt assemblage murmured its recognitions, sighed its deeper emotions, chuckled over the funny plates--deeming it all a most delightful entertainment. From time to time there were long hitches, marked by a curious sputtering noise above, and the abortive flashes of meaningless light on the screen, and the explanation was passed about in undertones that Mr. Shull was having difficulties with the machine.

A particular slide that ends the show had been added surreptitiously by the operator of the lantern, Mr. Shull, to embarrass Marsena Pulford, his partner in a portrait studio. The lantern show is not merely a realistic addition to the story but has an important dramatic purpose.

Though only a youngster during the time of the Civil War, Frederic had a life-long interest in photography and likely drew his description of the lantern performance from his childhood memories. Frederic makes the common mistake, however, of referring to the performance as a "stereopticon show" even though only one lantern was used.

Though fascinated by contrivances and inventive in adapting them to symbolic purposes in his stories, Nathaniel Hawthorn did not, I believe, make use of magic lanterns in any of his work; but in his well-known story "Ethan Brand" (1850) he makes dramatic use of an optical instrument, a portable diorama box carried on the back of an old German who traveled about giving shows to interested spectators.

> The pictures were worn out, moreover, tattered, full of cracks and wrinkles, dingy with tobacco-

> smoke, and otherwise in a most pitiable condition. Some purported to be cities, public edifices, and ruined castles in Europe; others represented Napoleon's battles and Nelson's seafights; and in the middle of these would be seen a gigantic, brown, hairy hand--which might have been mistaken for the Hand of Destiny, though in truth it was only the showman's--pointing its forefinger to various scenes of the conflict, while its owner gave historical illustrations.

A final example involves what is certainly a magic lantern, though the context is literary only if teleplays are regarded as a form of literature. In one of the segments of The Big Valley, a television series starring Barbara Stanwyck from 1965 to 1968, Miss Stanwyck is subjected to torture by a character portrayed by actress Julie Adams, who has had one of her Chinese servants project a magic lantern beam into the eyes of the bound and immobile Miss Stanwyck. A slowly revolving disk that projects changing colors into Miss Stanwyck's eyes is described by Miss Adams as an effective method used by Chinese terrorists to wear down the resistance of their enemies.

Cultural historians of China will know whether this method of torture was based upon actuality or was the product of a scriptwriter's imagination. Whatever the case, it is another example of the undeniable fact that in the hands of the unbalanced any object, even one that has brought pleasure to millions of people, can be made to serve ignoble purposes.

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KOCH'S CORNER: THE CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

Dues. In order to receive the Bulletin and keep your membership in force, your dues status must be kept current. Our membership year begins January 1. Dues remain at $7.50 for 1981. Members who joined during the year please prorate the amount you send to carry your membership to January 1982. PLEASE REMIT YOUR DUES PROMPTLY. They are the Society's only resource to meet its expenses.

It will probably be necessary to increase dues to $10 in 1982. This will be discussed at the August meeting in Rochester.

Back Issues. Until now, the Society has sent all past issues of the Bulletin to new members. This has become expensive. In the future, new members will receive only the current issue but may purchase past issues for 50¢ each.

Mailing Policy. Overseas members will continue to receive their copies of the Bulletin, sent by surface mail, under the $7.50 dues schedule. Those desiring the Bulletin to be sent by airmail will be required to pay an additional $2.50.

To help us maintain contact with the Magic Lantern Society of Great Britain, a copy of each of our Bulletins is sent without charge to be circulated among their members.

By-laws Committee. I have appointed Bob Bishop as the chairman of a committee to develop a consitution and bylaws for the Magic Lantern Society of the U.S.A. and Canada. Bob will select two members to help him with this. Please respond promptly to the inquiry he has sent out regarding the type of organization you want the Society to be. The final draft of the by-laws will be voted on by the entire membership.

Membership List. A new membership list is about to be issued. Please notify me immediately if you prefer that your name not be included.

National Meeting. As you know from the mailing Ed Lennert sent out just before Christmas, plans for the August meeting at Eastman House, Rochester, New York, are proceeding, although they have been scaled down somewhat from our first, over-ambitious plans. If you have not yet returned Ed's questionnaire to him, please do so immediately, as he must know how many of you will be able to attend and how active a role you will be able to play in preparing and participating in the convention. Put these important dates on your calendar: August 21 and 22. The success of the meeting depends upon you.

Use of the Membership List. From the last Bulletin you will recall that a question had been raised about the propriety of the membership list being used to offer lanterns and slides for sale. Expression of opinions from the members were requested. Thus far, I have received only one. George Reed of Philadelphia writes, "I believe first and foremost among nearly all collectors would be additions to their collections." He strongly endorses the use of a Buy/Sell/Trade column with a small fee charged for ads (which our Bulletin already has), but does not specifically address the issue of separate mailings of items for sale. He also indicates he favors an informal organizational structure "with a minimum of rules and regulations."

Member Participation. All voluntary organizations have difficulty in "spreading the work load," and ours, with the particular circumstance of being scattered so geographically, is no exception. I urge all of you to be responsive to questionnaires, requests for articles, requests for items of information, requests for specific services such as helping for preparation for our National Convention. In particular, I ask that you respond to the following:

- Ed Lennart re National Convention
- Nancy Bergh re list of lantern and slide manufacturers
- Bob Bishop re possible future by-laws
- Leora Wood Wells re items for the Bulletin.

How strong an organization becomes depends upon the willingness of its members to be givers as well as takers. Which are you?

NOTES FROM HERE AND THERE: THE EDITOR'S SCRAPBOOK

- The Boyertown Magic Lantern Disaster. In a flurry of attic cleaning, Mr. and Mrs. Albert Eaches of Phoenixville, Pa., recently ran across a 1975 clipping from the Pottstown Mercury. An explosion in a Boyertown tavern had brought to mind a 1908 disaster in the same building in which 173 lives were lost. At that time, the building was the Rhoads Opera House, and 400 people had assembled to see an illustrated lecture on the Scottish Reformation. Investigating a hissing noise from the projector, a stagehand knocked over a lantern, igniting the volatile gas with which the projector was illuminated. Within moments, the auditorium was a mass of flames and bodies were piling up at the exits as people fled in panic. Firemen, attempting to race uphill to the scene, lost control of their wagon, which careened back down the hill, impaling one fireman on the hitching rod and nailing his body to a tree. The fire, one of the worst in American history, stimulated important reforms in building codes. This gruesome tale, unfortunately, was anything but unique in magic lantern history. Numerous similar episodes are reported in old ML journals.

- Magic Lanterns in Paris. Our Christmas mail brought a treasure trove of photographs from my brother, Dr. Harry Wood, from which we learned that several lanterns are on display at the Pompidou, engravings of Zahn's 17th century featured in an exhibit on industrial design. Near the Musee Grevin, a display in a shop window contained several optical devices which we are unable to identify. They may be forms of cameras obscura. In any case, it appears as though Paris should be a happy hunting ground for any of you who plan to visit there.

. London Lantern Show. If your travel agenda for the year includes London, Society member David Brooke reports the Narrowboat Show of Doug and Anita Lear--referred to in a number of previous issues of the Bulletin--is excellent.

. Lantern Slides as a Graphic Resource. In developing exhibits for museums, my husband and I find our magic lantern slide collection a useful graphic resource. We photographed several slides from our Brotherhood of the Union set for use in the three Bicentennial Centers in Virginia our firm developed in 1976. More recently, we used a colorful representation of the reunion of Damon and Pythias in the Siege Museum in Petersburg, Virginia.
And what, you may wonder, have Damon and Pythias to do with the ten-month siege of Petersburg during the Civil War? Well, nothing. The museum, however, is located in a beautiful Greek Revival building, built initially for use as a merchant's exchange. It passed through many later uses, from a saloon and liquor business to the city jail. But at one point, it was known as the "Pythian Castle" because the Knights of Pythias met there. Much of this organization's philosophy is based on the famous story of the self-sacrificing friendship between Damon and Pythias, and lantern slide shows were regularly used in its rituals. So--when we were asked to develop a small exhibit on the history of the museum buildings--I turned to our slides for the graphic I needed to represent the "Pythian Castle" phase of its use.
Using our slides in unusual ways enhances our enjoyment of them. A caution, though: if you ever decide to use actual slides rather than photographs of them in an exhibit, remember that continuous light or heat or prolonged exposure to sunshine will destroy the colors. If the slides are not to be projected, the best arrangement is to use a visitor-operated pushbutton to illuminate them briefly from the rear.

. Magic Lantern Shows and Ice Cream Socials. The peripatetic Bob Bishop reports on several recent shows he has given, one combined with an old-fashioned ice cream social and one to raise funds for a new museum that is being developed in Sequim, Washington. Several Society members attended the first, and another member and his wife spent a day walking on the beach with Bob and Carm discussing--what else!--magic lanterns, auctions, and shows.
Other members have also been active in presenting shows recently. Joe and Alice Koch gave shows for their local Lions Club and three retirement homes. Galen Biery had the perfect setting--a large tent--for his show for the Bellingham, Washington, Maritime Celebration. John Potter had his first experience as a lanternist before a Tacoma Sunday School class. David Brooke reports that his shows seem to be leaning more and more toward vaudeville because he particularly enjoys establishing a responsive relationship with his audiences.
Please share your experiences in giving shows with our members through the Bulletin. We can all learn from--and be amused by--each other's experiences.

. Northwest Group Meeting. This active subgroup--the only one I know of in our Society--met November 15 at the home of Galen and Dorothy Biery in Bellingham, Washington. Galen presented slides of early theaters of Whatcom County.

. Kreisman Collection. Nancy Bergh has sent us word of the October death of Marvin Kreisman, co-founder with his wife of the American Photography Museum in Baraboo, Wisconsin. Kreisman, a photographer and photo-historian, was well-known through his articles in magazines and newspapers in the U.S. and abroad. At the time of his death from heart disease at age 46, he and his wife were seeking a permanent location where the collection could be kept intact.

. Subway Cinema. We are also indebted to Nancy and her father for an item describing the ingenious "subway cinema" installed on a 300 foot wall of Brooklyn's Myrtle Avenue station. Artist Bill Brand adapted concepts from such devices as the zoetrope and Muybridge's zoopraxiscope to create the illusion of an animated picture story for passengers on the

Manhattan-bound B,D,N or OB subway trains. The difference is that in Brand's creation, the images stand still while the viewer moves past them. Will some of our New York members hie themselves off for a subway ride and give us a first-hand viewer's report?

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BOOKS OLD AND NEW

. Photographs for the Tsar. Dial Press, 1980, 216 pages, illustrated in color and black and white, was published at $35. It is available at discount bookshops for somewhat less than that. It presents part of a pre-World War I collection of 2000 slides produced in a laborious three-negative process by Sergei M. Prokudin-Gorskii, who persuaded the Tsar to let him roam all over Russia in a specially equipped railroad car. The slides were used in history classes. Prokudin-Gorskii died in 1943, and some years later the collection was purchased for the Library of Congress by the Rockefeller Foundation. Because of technical difficulties involved in printing, the quality of the photo-reproduction in the book leaves something to be desired. Even so, this is a marvelous beginning toward wider awareness of this significant collection which brings us, as the Washington Post put it, images of Russia's "gilded phantasmagoric churches and the pleasant aspen-shrouded summer homes of forgotten generals." It is of particular interest to our Society, of course, because of the illumination it casts on one phase of the history of magic lantern use.

. Seek and You Shall Find. That was the heading on a note received recently from Jim Flanagan. At a photography show, Jim picked up a 50 page pamphlet entitled The Photo-Miniature, a reprint of a monthly magazine of information about photography and magic lantern slides which was published in 1899 by Tennant and Ward, New York. The booklet lists more than 165 other publications relating to magic lanterns and photography. Some of these are:

Animated Photography. Cecil M. Hepworth, 1900
Coloring Lantern Slides. Photo-Miniature No. 83
Modern Magic Lanterns and Their Management. R. Child Bayley, 1897
Optical Lanterns and Accessories. Paul N. Hasluck, 1901
The Lantern and How to Use It. C. Goodwin Norton, 1901
How to Make Lantern Slides. S.L. Coulthurst, 1901
Lantern Slide Making. Rev. F.C. Lambert, 1901
Practical Slide Making. G.T. Harris, 1902
Lantern Slides. Photo-Miniature No. 9
(Publishing company names not given.)

Jim concludes his note, "Well, don't just sit there; go out and find them!"

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CAN YOU TELL ME?--QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT MAGIC LANTERNS

Q: The January, 1980 ML Bulletin mentions a Champion Sciopticon, 1888, with 4" round slides set in a 16" revolving disk. This reminded me of a monster I have that is made of Russian iron and looks like a Buck Rogers ray gun. The arc department is housed in blued steel with a pattern of ½" holes, as is the separate 110 volt, 4½ amp transformer. The slide holder revolves and I had thought it was to rock a boat, but I guess it too may have been designed for circular slides. The lens and housing are marked Victor Animatograph Co., Davenport, Iowa, USA. Can you tell me anything about it?

Jim Flanagan

A: The fact that your lantern is electric means it dates from the 20th century. Designs for the lanterns often changed very little when the changeover from one type of fuel to another occurred. The Victor Animatograph identification may be either that of a maker or a distributor. I suggest that you contact the research librarian of the main branch of the public library in Davenport, Iowa, and inquire whether ads for this company appear in city directories in the early 1900's and whether you can obtain copies

of the information. These might provide clues you could track down for further information. Can any member give Jim more specific information? What about you, Nancy Bergh--does this name appear on the list you are compiling? And what about the following query?

Q: I am writing concerning a projector I acquired while cleaning out our old Masonic Lodge. The only marking I have found says M.C. Lilley Co., Columbus, Ohio. The projector has its own built-in lamp which rests on a built-in tray. The metalwork trim is nickel plated, which I am told means the projector was probably made after the 1890's. I have about 40 slides and would like to know the current value of this item.

Gary Myers

A: As indicated above, the fact that your lantern is electric means that it dates from the 20th century. Its style suggests the early part of the century. The photo you enclosed bears a remarkable similarity to the Sciopticon referred to in the January 1980 issue of the Bulletin, especially the spraddled stance of the fancy legs, which caused us to nickname ours "The Bug." It too was used in lodge work, in Knights of Pythias rituals, and like yours and Jim Flanagan's, came from the Midwest. I have no pictures of your slides, so I don't know whether your lantern uses large rotating discs or the more conventional rectangular slides. It seems possible that these three lanterns may have some common elements of heritage. However, many manufacturers made lanterns of similar design, so this is hard to pin down.

As for the value, prices are, unfortunately, whatever the market will bear, and they vary in different parts of the country. As we've said in previous issues, your best guidelines can be obtained by attending large antique shows in your area and checking the prices of lanterns you see.

Q: I have an electric, bellows-type lantern which has a water-tight tank between the condensing lenses in addition to the usual slide opening in front. The tank area comes into focus and small fish, etc. could be projected very nicely. There are no markings except on the Kodak lens. Two circular cardboard disks in the box say, "Stop for enlarging only. See page 10 in Kodiopticon Manual." Can you tell me anything about this item?

Jim Flanagan

A: Does any member have a Kodiopticon Manual in which he can look up this information and share it with Jim through the Bulletin?

Water chambers were used for two purposes in late 19th and early 20th century lanterns. Mahogony-framed slides containing two glasses separated by india rubber were widely used in scientific lectures, while water cells located between the condensing lenses served primarily to avoid overheating. For a picture of the first type, see p. 465 of The Boy's Playbook of Science by John Henry Pepper, published in 1912. The Art of Projection and Complete Magic Lantern Manual, published in 1893, describes this type of slide and says, "The live box is made to contain portions of liquid containing infusoria, and other small animals or plants can be confined so as to prevent evaporation and allow of their being watched in a living state."

It seems more likely that your lantern is similar to a type described by Simon and Henry Gage in Optic Projection, published in 1914. Page 237 says, "For micro-projection, a water-cell in connection with a large condenser is a necessity. It absorbs most of the radiant energy in the infra-red part of the spectrum and thus helps to avoid the overheating which would result if all this energy remained. The best position of the water-cell is between the first and second elements of the condenser, where the rays are practically parallel." Page 607 adds, "All the light energy absorbed by the specimen is converted into heat; hence, an opaque specimen or one which is black would become heated in the concentrated beam of light" unless this precautionary cooling device were used. Diagrams of this type of water cell appear on pages 222 and 608.

For the fantasies engendered by the projection of live specimens, see the above article on "Brownies, Woogle-Bugs and Magic Lanterns."

Q: Can anyone give me information about the firm of Bamforths of Holmfirth and New

York? Among other things, they published postcards of which I have some 15,000.

Derek Ramsden, W. Yorkshire

A: Do any of our New York members have information about this firm to share with our British member? Derek gives no date guidelines, so the information might be difficult to track down through City Directories, but keep it in mind.

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MEMBERS NEAR AND FAR

From History Buff to Lanternist: Introducing Galen Biery

New technologies have brought many changes to Whatcom County, Washington, in the past half-century, but many of the traditional methods, activities, and historical events are well-documented through the efforts of Society member Galen Biery. Combining his interest in local history with a life-long interest in photography and optical projection, Biery makes his own photographic slides and has developed magic lantern shows on a wide range of topics including Northwest lumbering and logging, the Pacific American Fisheries, old opera houses and theaters and other aspects of local industry and history. Since 1958, he has presented more than 500 shows before school and college audiences, historical societies, fraternal organizations and clubs, and industrial and civic groups. He uses a bellows-type projector of the kind many members will remember from the auditorium programs of their school days.

Biery first learned how to make lantern slides in the 1920's. Much of the equipment in the fully-equipped darkroom in his home is custom-made by Biery himself to meet the special requirements of producing clear, sharp photographs for the slides. Over the years he has consulted with professional photographers in his efforts to perfect his own techniques.

As a 20-year Board member of the Whatcom County Museum, Biery has a strong interest in preseving the area's history for the enlightenment of future generations. In recent years he has expanded his efforts to include taping on-the-spot commentaries at points of local historical interest such as the old City Hall and waterfront area of his hometown of Bellingham. He is also widely known to the audience of station KVOS-TV for his television show for children.

As a lanternist, Biery has his own criteria for measuring the response of a live audience. "If I hear feet shuffling or people coughing," he says,"I know it is time to get on with the show. Good feedback is when it is so quiet you can hear a pin drop."

From Special Effects Man to Lantern Collector: Introducing Allan Osborne

One of our newest members, Allan Osbourne of Fort Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, has been fascinated by magic lanterns and hand-crank movie projectors since he was 15 years old but began serious collecting three years ago. His interest in lanterns is based on their role in the evolution of motion pictures and extends to other optical devices as well. Allan and a friend, Dennis Nicholson, are trying to get a film special effects business off the ground. His ultimate goal is to establish a motion picture museum in Australia, "Although," he adds, "I stress that this is a very long-term goal."

In October, Allan went on a prolonged "collecting hunt," the biggest, he says, he has ever undertaken, "although I have travelled literally thousands of miles over the last three years."

Having learned about our Society through the British one, Allan got in touch and, he reports, was so enraptured by the packet of ML Bulletins and other information he received that he almost missed going to work, and upon his return sat up until 5:30am reading this "fabulous bunch of goodies."

Allan has promised to do some articles for the Bulletin, which should give us an interesting international perspective. He also tells us that in all of Australia, he knows of only one other serious collector, his friend Dr. Garry Scroop of South Australia, so he is eager to establish correspondence with lantern enthusiasts here. Look for his address in the next membership list.